United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Bosnian Presidency forces attack UNPROFOR unit on Mount Igman, near Sarajevo; commander of Presidency forces acknowledges attack was made in error; UNPROFOR French company commander wounded; unknown number of Bosnian casualties caused by return fire.

+ Investigation finds "clear and convincing" evidence that General Mohamed Farah Aideed authorized 5 June attack which killed 24 UNOSOM II peace-keepers in Mogadishu; report says General Aideed and senior colleagues are liable to prosecution before international tribunal or criminal courts of any State.

+ Cease-fire brokered by UNPROFOR holds in central Bosnian town of Mostar; United Nations aid convoy expected to reach town today following agreement on humanitarian access.

+ UNHCR assists refugees fleeing Government offensive in southern Sudan; some 60,000 Sudanese cross into Uganda in two days.

+ Chairman of Palestinian Rights Committee tells Symposium on Question of Palestine that Middle East peace talks prove dialogue is possible; urges European countries and organizations to continue to promote comprehensive settlement.

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Elements of the Bosnian Presidency forces today attacked a unit of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) on Mount Igman, near Sarajevo, according to a press release issued by UNPROFOR this afternoon. The French company commander was wounded and evacuated. The UNPROFOR unit returned fire, causing an undetermined number of casualties. After a few hours' standoff, the UNPROFOR soldiers forced the Presidency troops to withdraw.

The commander of the Bosnian Presidency forces later acknowledged the facts of the incident as reported by UNPROFOR, and said that the attack had been made in error, according to the release.

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The UNPROFOR forces were monitoring a zone evacuated by the Bosnian Serb Army on Mount Igman, at the request of Thorvald Stoltenberg, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Co-Chairman of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic had made the Bosnian Serb withdrawal a pre-condition for his return to the Geneva peace talks.

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There is clear and convincing evidence that General Mohamed Farah Aideed authorized the 5 June attack which killed 24 Pakistani peace-keepers serving with the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), and that the attack was carried out by elements of the Somali National Alliance (SNA), according to a report issued today. The report was compiled after a comprehensive investigation into the incident, conducted by an independent expert on behalf of the Secretary-General.

The attack on the peace-keepers violated multiple provisions of the 1962 Somali Penal Code which had never been repealed, the report pointed out. It also violated international law and thus made General Aideed and his senior colleagues liable to prosecution before an international tribunal or the criminal courts of any State.

There was also sufficient evidence to make a prima facie case that an attack on a Pakistani strong point in Mogadishu on 13 June had been designed by persons associated with the SNA to wound or kill non-combatants, the report went on to say. A central principle of international humanitarian law -- respect for the distinction between combatants and non-combatants -- was violated when individuals or organizations used civilians as shields for military operations or demonstrated a wanton indifference to the protection of non-combatants, the report noted.

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A cease-fire brokered by the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is holding in the central Bosnian town of Mostar, according to a United Nations spokesman. The cease-fire came into effect last night in anticipation of a United Nations aid convoy reaching Mostar today.

Agreement on humanitarian access was reached yesterday after negotiations involving both sides in Mostar and United Nations officials led by Cedric Thornberry, UNPROFOR's Head of Civil Affairs. UNPROFOR military observers entered the town this morning to monitor the cease-fire.

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Some 60,000 refugees have crossed from Sudan into Uganda in the last two days fleeing a Government offensive in the western Equatorial region of southern Sudan, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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(UNHCR). The latest influx brings to 106,000 the number of Sudanese refugees who have fled into Uganda, Zaire, Ethiopia and Kenya since the offensive began on 5 August.

The new arrivals have been provided with food, medical assistance and shelter by UNHCR and non-governmental organizations working in the region. UNHCR is currently assisting more than 400,000 Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

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The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Keba Birane Cisse (Senegal), said in Vienna today that the 10 rounds of Middle East peace talks sponsored by the Russian Federation and the United States had proven that dialogue was possible, although they had not yet yielded substantive results. Addressing the opening session of the Seventh United Nations European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, he urged European countries and organizations to continue their efforts to promote a comprehensive settlement.

Also addressing the opening session, Bernard Mills, Chairman of the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, stressed that so far Europe had played only a supportive role to the United States in its sponsorship of the peace talks. As a neighbour of the Middle East, it had much to lose if there was war or instability in the region, thus could not afford to let another country, far away, play the dominant role in mediation.

The two-day symposium was organized by the Palestinian Rights Committee, in order to heighten awareness of the situation in Palestine and to create an atmosphere more favourable to the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

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